

Neither colony nor enclave: calling for dialogical contextualism in management and organization studies

Article (Published Version)

Hamann, Ralph, Luiz, John, Ramaboa, Kutlwano, Khan, Farzad, Dhlamini, Xolisa and Nilsson, Warren (2020) Neither colony nor enclave: calling for dialogical contextualism in management and organization studies. *Organization Theory*, 1 (1). pp. 1-21. ISSN 2631-7877

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/86101/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:


Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.



Neither Colony Nor Enclave: Calling for dialogical contextualism in management and organization studies

Organization Theory
Volume 1: 1–21
© The Author(s) 2020
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/2631787719879705
journals.sagepub.com/home/ott
 SAGE

Ralph Hamann¹, John Luiz^{1,3}, Kutlwano Ramaboa¹,
Farzad Khan², Xolisa Dhlamini¹ and
Warren Nilsson¹

Abstract

We express our unease with one-sided invitations into the Northern mainstream, as well as with Southern critics' retreat into indigenous enclaves of organizational scholarship. We use this dichotomy to theorize the role of context in organizational theorizing by linking scholarly conversations on context, analogical reasoning, and problematizing assumptions. This creates the opportunity to more carefully consider how not just our theoretical backgrounds but also our contextual life-worlds provide the assumptions and analogies we bring into our theorizing. We use this platform to consider in more detail systematic biases in both the Northern mainstream (erasing and imposing biases) and the Southern critique (scapegoating and valorizing biases). These biases have in common that they essentialize context. To address this risk and to facilitate contextual reflexivity, we propose a form of dialogical scholarly engagement to generate complementary spaces to fruitfully question our contextually embedded assumptions.

Keywords

analogical reasoning, context, decolonizing knowledge, dialogical contextualism, problematizing

There is a tension in management and organization studies (MOS) between the global and the local, and between the “North” and the “South,” that is, between perspectives and interests of mainstream researchers in the former colonial powers associated with “Northern” (or “Western”) modernity, especially in Europe and North America, and those in the “Southern”

¹University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business, Cape Town, South Africa

²Prince Mohammad Bin Salman College of Business and Entrepreneurship, Saudi Arabia

³University of Sussex Business School, United Kingdom

Corresponding author:

Ralph Hamann, University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business, Cape Town, 8002, South Africa.

Email: ralph.hamann@gsb.uct.ac.za



Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (<http://www.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

periphery, the former colonies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Alcadipani, Khan, Gantman, & Nkomo, 2012; Westwood, Jack, Khan, & Frenkel, 2014). On the one hand, scholarly associations like the Academy of Management increasingly purport to foster and represent a global network of scholars and ideas. International accreditations seek to “raise the standard of management education worldwide” (EFMD, 2018). Global expansion is also *de rigueur* for the field’s prestigious journals. For example, the *Academy of Management Journal* editors argue, “As management scholarship expands its geographical interest from Western and Eastern developed economies to the rest of the world, it is time to bring Africa in to our mainstream research and theories” (George, Corbishley, Khayesi, Haas, & Tihanyi, 2016, p. 379). As MOS scholars based (mostly) in African contexts, we appreciate this invitation. But we—and many of our students and colleagues—are also vexed by the somewhat one-sided nature of “bringing Africa in” (Abrahamsen, 2017; George et al., 2016) as long as we “learn the language and rules of the game” (George, 2012, p. 1026) and adopt basic assumptions of the established mainstream journals.

On the other hand, there is vocal resistance to this globalization of management education and research as an expression of “hegemonic ethnocentrism” (Alcadipani et al., 2012, p. 133). This Southern critique views elite journals and business school accreditations as perpetuating “epistemic colonialism” (Ibarra-Colado, 2006), imposing “a discussion of Western managerial theories which may not apply in the African context” (Darley & Luethge, 2019, p. 104). Accepting this imposition, as scholars based in African or other Southern contexts, may force us to “deny our own identity” (Ibarra-Colado, 2006, p. 471), or even to become “local intermediaries, who enable foreign domination by promoting the interests of Western autonomous/dominant pole within their postcolonial business schools” (Pederzini & Barraza, 2019). Instead, these authors argue that we should rather focus on

“indigenous management practices” and theories (Darley & Luethge, 2019, p. 104).

We think it is odd to suggest that our options are so dichotomized. We are given the choice of either becoming a colony of the Northern mainstream or retreating into a Southern “indigenous” enclave. But this dichotomy is not only salient to us as scholars based in Southern contexts. The conflicting perspectives between the Northern mainstream and the Southern critique have become political controversies in the field. More importantly, for the purpose of this paper, we argue that the dichotomy between colony and enclave is underpinned by problematic biases in the theorizing process. Both the Northern mainstream and the Southern critique essentialize the nexus between scholars’ context and identities, privileging and instrumentalizing their own contextual assumptions uncritically. Thus, the Northern mainstream tends to trivialize Southern contexts, while the Southern critique risks overemphasizing and valorizing them. To move beyond this impasse, we propose a dialogical approach to fostering contextual reflexivity in organizational theorizing.

Our argument develops as follows. First, we explain our unease with both the invitations for inclusion in the Northern mainstream, and with the retreat into indigenous enclaves recommended by the Southern critique. Then, to better understand the underpinnings of this two-sided unease, we consider the role of social-cultural context in shaping researchers’ assumptions in the theorizing process. This allows us to show how essentializing this context—that is, uncritically assuming contextual similarities or differences in a way that suits our scholarly ambitions—can lead to systematic biases in both the Northern mainstream and the Southern critique. Our recommended response to this risk of essentializing context is to complement the predominant dialectic approach to scholarship with greater dialogical engagement across contexts to foster contextual reflexivity in the theorizing process. We call this dialogical contextualism.

Against Becoming Colonies

Why might we pause at invitations to join the Northern mainstream? For a start, it often seems a one-sided affair. The invitation for “international submissions” is issued because “the scholarly field of management *needs* it” (George, 2012, p. 1026), presumably to better encompass and represent the diversity and plurality of global scholarly perspectives. Implicitly recognized in this invitation is the “Anglo-American domination and the exclusion of many developing regions” in mainstream organizational scholarship (Murphy & Zhu, 2012, p. 915), an exclusion that is particularly pronounced for the African continent. However, the terms of engagement are predetermined by those doing the inviting: “The process of getting into well-established conversations requires that the non-U.S. authors learn the language and rules of the game” (George, 2012, p. 1026). We are not denying the depth and importance of the theoretical traditions and methodological rigor built up over decades in well-established, elite journals, nor the hard work that is necessary to become conversant in these traditions and capable of such rigor. Yet it seems problematic that invitees are told at the outset how to think and behave if they want to sit at the table. This is not least because such assimilation may well undermine the plurality of global perspectives sought through the invitation. “Those not of the North are obliged to either conform and play the game or not be given entry and voice” (Ul-Haq & Westwood, 2012, p. 243). This challenge is also highlighted by authors well-established in the mainstream: “Given the worldwide dominance of U.S. journals, researchers from other countries seeking publications in these journals often have to adopt similar epistemological and ontological views to that of much U.S. scholarship—overlooking the idiosyncratic qualities of their own research contexts” (Bruton, Zahra, & Cai, 2018, p. 352).

This is all the more relevant given the power relations at play. “Inviting Africa in” may perpetuate a colonial posture, in which the hosts display their graciousness in helping the invited, while ignoring their problematic historical and

continuing enmeshment. The African continent is still treated as a kind of *tabula rasa* (or blank slate) that can be analyzed, manipulated, and inserted into the mainstream at the behest of Northern guardians, without its own agency or knowledge. This emptiness or lack relative to a Northern standard is explicit from the get-go: “The greatest challenge to business in Africa stems from the persistence of institutional voids” (George et al., 2016, p. 377), that is, an absence of the kind of institutions assumed in the United States and other developed countries of the North (Bothello, Nason, & Schnyder, 2019). It implies there are no institutions in African contexts worthy of consideration on their own terms. It accepts as its point of departure a one-dimensional view of the African continent as a land of bland suffering by ostensibly reminding us that “there is a great deal more to learn from Africa than social development” (George et al., 2016, p. 389). Relatedly, it is striking how often it still seems necessary to point out that Africa is not a country and that there is much diversity between and within its 54 countries. For instance, a recent newsletter of the AOM’s Organization and Management Theory division proudly described a workshop discussing “organizational research using data from around the world, including Africa, China, India, Israel, and Russia.”

This unease resonates with and builds upon a flourishing conversation in the humanities and social sciences around the need for and meaning of “decolonizing knowledge” (e.g., Chakrabarty, 2000; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012; Connell, 2007; Connell, Maia, & Morrell, 2017; Mufti, 2005; Said, 1978), a conversation that is gaining traction also in MOS (e.g., Alcadipani et al., 2012; Bothello et al., 2019; Jack, Westwood, Srinivas, & Sardar, 2011; Khan & Naguib, 2019; Nkomo, 2011; Ul-Haq & Westwood, 2012; Westwood et al., 2014). Colonialism is not just a historical phenomenon in this conversation, but more broadly “a system of naturalizing differences in such a way that the hierarchies that justify domination, oppression, and so on are considered the product of the inferiority of certain peoples and not

the cause of their so-called inferiority” (Santos, 2014, p. 18). Decolonizing knowledge arguably has special pertinence in MOS because of the way management as an academic discipline grew on the back of intentional, strategic efforts to proliferate American conceptions of business and management (Alcadipani & Rosa, 2011; Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006; Westwood & Jack, 2008), spreading an “instrumental rationality” (Ibarra-Colado, 2006) focused on market competition, private property norms, an extractive view of nature, and corporate forms of organization, while excluding and denigrating pre-existing or alternative forms of organizing based on, for instance, communal, cooperative, and nature-reverent norms.

Postcolonial and decolonial theorists’ concern is that this continuing proliferation and globalization “implies that management knowledge and practices generated and developed in Western countries, especially in the US, can be seamlessly transferred to other contexts” (Alcadipani & Rosa, 2011, p. 454). Concepts and theories “emanating primarily from the United States . . . are largely represented as universal . . . [even though] the ‘universal’ is indeed specific” (Nkomo, 2011, p. 371). This is problematic not only because of contextual mismatches, but because it replicates colonial patterns that disregard or trivialize knowledge and practices of the former colonies in the Global South: “the colonial meeting between Northern and Southern knowledge has created a naturalized view that useful, intelligible, and visible ways to manage an organization are necessarily found in the knowledge produced in the North” (Alcadipani & Rosa, 2011, p. 454). The globalization of management knowledge is thus seen as building upon and perpetuating “hegemonic ethnocentrism” (Alcadipani et al., 2012, p. 133) or even “epistemic colonialism . . . [through which] knowledge is used as a form of control to hide the colonial condition” (Ibarra-Colado, 2006, pp. 4464, 468).

We are cautious about some of the directions that this postcolonial theoretical critique might take us, as we will discuss below. But it helps contextualize and explain the often-visceral

response from many of our Southern colleagues and students to Northern invitations. We are invited to contribute as long as we accept as a point of departure the established assumptions, language, theories, and rules of the Northern mainstream. Yet an authentic invitation to a scholarly conversation probably ought to include at least some openness to reconsidering the content, focus, and temperament of the scholarly conversation. Is it a conversation if we specify who can say what in what kind of way?

As noted by one of our students (based in South Africa but originally from the United States), because such invitations see “Africa only as a context in which to study our current understanding of management, we miss the opportunity to see how organizational life has variations that we haven’t even yet conceived of because we have been stuck in a Northern-based worldview” (Rayner, personal communication; see also Bothello et al., 2019; Jack et al., 2011; Khan & Naguib, 2019). Similar sentiments are expressed by an Indian Professor Dipankar, cited by Kothiyal, Bell, and Clarke (2018, p. 145): “American journals only look for concepts familiar to them. Creative conceptual contribution from India is hardly welcome.” Moreover, it is problematic to invite African (or other Southern) contexts into mainstream scholarship and to highlight its “institutional voids” while entirely disregarding the complex history, in which African knowledge systems and institutions were proactively denigrated, exterminated, or exploited by mainstream Northern coalitions of academics, businesses, and governments during and after colonialism.

Beyond this disregard for history, the notion of “institutional voids” exemplifies much of mainstream MOS’ tendency to interpret Southern organizational dynamics in teleological terms as trying to “catch up” with what we see in Europe or North America. This not only ignores historical enmeshments and the possibility of diverse developmental trajectories, or the possibility that “nations that comprise what today is the Global South have demonstrated the possession of relevant [management

knowledge] throughout history” (Alcadipani et al., 2012, p. 133; Hountondji, 1997). It also disregards important trends, in which the Global South expresses portents of broader, global developments. “What if,” ask Comaroff and Comaroff (2012, p. 114), “we invert that Order of Things . . . [if] it is the so-called ‘Global South’ that affords privileged insight into the workings of the world at large?” It is worth quoting them at more length:

Contrary to the received Euromodernist narrative of the past two centuries—which has the so-called Global South tracking behind the curve of Universal History, always in deficit, always playing catch up—there is good reason to think the opposite: that, in the here-and-now, it is regions in the South that tend first to feel the concrete effects of world-historical processes as they play themselves out, thus to prefigure the future of the former metropole . . . Put another way: while Euro-America and its antipodes are caught up in the same all-embracing world-historical processes, old margins are becoming new frontiers, places where mobile, globally-competitive capital finds minimally regulated zones in which to vest its operations; where industrial manufacture opens up ever more cost-efficient sites for itself; where highly flexible, informal economies—of the kind now expanding everywhere—have long thrived; where those performing outsourced services for the North develop cutting edge info-tech empires of their own, both legitimate and illicit; where new idioms of work, time, and value take root, thus to alter planetary practices. Which is why the Global North appears to be “evolving” southward. In many respects, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America seem to be running ahead of the Euromodern world, harbingers of *its* history-in-the-making. (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012, p. 121)

These are clearly vital trends that are receiving attention from some management and organization scholars. For example, there is a growing conversation in MOS on informality in labor markets and entrepreneurship (e.g., Barley, Bechky, & Milliken, 2017; Webb, Tihanyi, Ireland, & Sirmon, 2009), even if the recurring tone of describing informality as

“shadowy” (Bruton, Ireland, & Ketchen, 2012) may seem a bit odd to the many entrepreneurs and scholars in Africa for whom it is a very overt, legitimate, and normal part of life. More generally, the Global South is largely seen in mainstream MOS as an intriguing context to study stuff that is different to “home.” As a global community of scholars, we are thus potentially missing an important opportunity to recognize and study phenomena in the Global South, such as growing informality and alternative forms of organizing, as portents of broader, global developments.

Against Becoming Enclaves

If we and many of our Southern colleagues share some indignation at being invited by gatekeepers of mainstream MOS journals in a somewhat one-sided manner, there is yet a diverse array of options for our responses. Some authors, like Darley and Luethge (2019), argue that we should focus on “indigenous management practices” and that we develop and focus on our own journals and ignore international accreditations. We agree that focusing on context-embedded, endogenous management practices has value, and fostering regional journals can help (Kiggundu & Lamont, 2015). Both strategies can begin to address a possibly unhelpful “extraversion” of Southern scholars (Hountondji, 1997), that is, a tendency to prioritize and valorize Northern mainstream theories and practices even if their applicability in local contexts is limited. But we are concerned that taking an inward-looking approach too far can create Southern enclaves that become isolated from broader scholarly conversation. Such isolation would hamper the exchange and spread of theoretical ideas, as well as methodological advances and understanding. It would deprive both those in the enclaves and those in the mainstream of the plurality and diversity of voices and perspectives that should foster theoretical advances and profounder responses to complex social and ecological challenges.

We are not advocating here for a wholesale ambition for Southern scholars to uncritically join the Northern mainstream. There may be important benefits to be gained by Southern scholars strengthening their material and intellectual positions by collaborating among themselves in the development of “indigenous theory” (Bruton et al., 2018; Van de Ven, Meyer, & Jing, 2018). There may even be cause for some “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, 1998) among Southern scholars in developing methodological and conceptual repertoires distinct from the Northern mainstream. But in our view, this should be a pragmatic, political strategy in order to gain a position of strength, from which to then engage again in broader scholarly conversations, also with the Northern mainstream. We worry about an inward focus becoming a default epistemological posture, which would result in enclaves becoming not a refuge and bastion for independent thought, but isolated and intellectually starved islands.

One of the reasons for this is that an overly inward-looking approach may foster a romanticized or misplaced emphasis on indigeneity. There is a risk that Southern scholars respond to epistemic colonialism with essentialized notions of indigenous knowledge, which “can suggest stasis and romanticism, encouraging idealization and confirming prejudice” (Alcadipani et al., 2012, p. 133). We will return to the risk of idealizing indigenous knowledge in more detail later, but here we want to emphasize the dangers of contrasting indigenous knowledge in opposition to “Western” or “scientific” knowledge. Such oppositional approaches can have harmful political and practical effects, as evidenced in the “devastating mistake” (Connell, 2014, p. 212) of denying scientific explanations and treatment of HIV/AIDS by South Africa’s government under former President Thabo Mbeki.

Mbeki questioned the link between HIV and AIDS, arguing that to accept this link would be to uncritically accept a Western “orthodox education” and interpretation of medicine, which is furthermore shaped unduly by the interests of multinational pharmaceutical companies. He

also argued that AIDS needed to be understood in the context of the broader challenges of poverty and malnutrition in Africa, and that indigenous medicine may fit better with these contexts. When asked in 2001 whether he would take an HIV/AIDS test, he firmly responded in the negative and stated: “It would be setting an example within the context of a particular paradigm” (Gevisser, 2007, p. 727). Mbeki’s arguments seem to align with a postcolonial theoretical critique, outlined above, but in our view he took this too far and thus disregarded the vital benefits of the emerging insights developed in mainstream science. As argued by Green (2012, p. 3): “The conceptual opposition generated a deadly ‘either-or’—either African medicine or Western science—that undergirded the South African state’s failure to provide antiretrovirals . . . [and] contributed massively to an AIDS mortality figure of well over 3 million.” Our worry about retreating into enclaves is that it may perpetuate such oppositional, binary approaches between indigenous knowledge and broader scholarly and policy-related conversations, including but also going beyond the Northern mainstream.

Hybridity As a Way Forward?

Scholars have suggested the notion of hybridity as an antidote to an exclusive, ostensibly pure emphasis on some or other form of indigeneity that perpetuates a binary, dichotomizing logic. Nkomo (2011, p. 378) notes, “Juxtaposing African culture and Western culture or the past greatness/present backwardness dichotomy reinforces the very binary which colonial and imperial discourse uses to keep the marginalized in subjection.” An emphasis on hybridity, on the other hand, takes “into consideration the fusion and the mutual effects of colonizers and the colonized” (Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006, p. 855). Contrasting the binary logic of Said’s (1978) *Orientalism* with Bhabha’s (1994) emphasis on hybridity, Frenkel and Shenhav (2006, p. 856) argue that “while management theory needs to recognize the Orientalist assumptions embedded in its [canonical] texts,

at the same time it needs to acknowledge the hybrid nature of the colonial encounter, the fusion between colonizers and the colonized, and the mutual effects between them.” While such hybridity breaks down or makes permeable the boundaries between North and South, between colonizer and colonized, it obviously does not suggest a comfortable mixing or fusion among equals, but is laced with power asymmetries and is “replete with resistance and opposition” (Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006, p. 869).

This notion of hybridity was developed with regard to the encounter between Northern and Southern, between the cultures of the colonizers and colonized (Bhabha, 1994), and fruitfully applied to MOS (Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006; Kothiyal et al., 2018; Yousfi, 2014). It also points to the enmeshment of North and South at the level of “world-historical processes” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012, p. 114), as noted above, as well as within individual identities (Kothiyal et al., 2018; Nkomo, 2011). As authors, we recognize that we represent relatively privileged situations within Southern and specifically African scholarly networks, with the financial means to participate in international conferences and so on. Two of us are white South Africans, which comes with its own baggage of unjust privilege, no matter our work during or after apartheid. At the same time, we identify as Africans working to reverse historical and ongoing injustices perpetuated by global colonialism and its “internal” variants within, for instance, South Africa or the United States (Nkomo, 1992; Wolpe, 1975). We thus struggle daily with the enmeshment of Northern and Southern dimensions and experiences within our own identities, though we also recognize that we are in a relatively comfortable position to engage in such “struggle,” and to make use of hybridity’s potential to produce ambivalence, to disrupt asymmetrical power relations, and to “encourage a multiplicity of voices and possibilities, which might challenge the assumptions upon which our perspective of the world is built” (Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006, p. 872). This is especially so if compared with the psychological trauma experienced by some of our black colleagues who have

had more direct, racialized exposure to the colonial and postcolonial experience (see, e.g., Fanon, 2008; Nkomo, 1992, 2011).

Hybridity thus emerges or manifests itself in different ways in different contexts (Yousfi, 2014). Srinivas (2013) explores how an Indian manager adopts the habitus of the colonizer in his quest to “get ahead.” Such mimicry creates an often awkward admixture of local and foreign elements, often for the purpose of maintaining a legitimating front (Alcadipani et al., 2012; Caldas & Wood, 1997). Similar hybridization practices and outcomes are described in studies of academics (Kothiyal et al., 2018). One Indian professor is quoted as saying, “We do whatever the West is doing . . . we have been trained to ‘toe the line’” (Kothiyal et al., 2018, p. 144). Even so, this mimicry can trigger resistance and produce ambiguity, thus giving rise not to (necessarily imperfect) replicas of the ostensibly ideal scholar, but diverse forms of hybridity.

Whereas many forms of mimicry have a passive or reactive character, hybridity may also emerge from a more self-conscious, assertive, and reflexive posture. Islam (2012, p. 163) uses the Brazilian metaphor of “anthropophagy” as marking “moments of intercultural contact, where devouring the other at once acknowledges an appetitive desire for appropriation and an aggressive process of deconstruction.” The implication for managers and scholars in the Global South is to go beyond “selective appropriation” or grudging mimicry of Northern management knowledge, and towards consciously, proactively, and reflexively fostering “a sense of historical irony and ambivalence” (Islam, 2012, p. 168).

Such an assertive, reflexive approach to hybridity represents an important challenge and opportunity for Southern scholars weary of invitations by the Northern mainstream and of retreats into Southern enclaves. Yet it still leaves unexamined the underlying problems with both of these invitations. Second, the existing work on hybridity largely focuses on the challenges and opportunities of Southern actors and scholars, so the implications for those in the

Northern mainstream remain underexposed. Finally, it remains unclear what an assertive and reflexive hybridity might look like in more practical terms. Thus, to develop an agreed point of departure for a critique of both the Northern mainstream and of Southern enclaves, and to identify resulting implications for MOS across the board, we need to reconsider the role of context in the theorizing process.

Theorizing the Role of Context in Theorizing

The relationship between theory and context, that is, “the surroundings associated with phenomena which help to illuminate [those] phenomena” (Cappelli & Sherer, 1991, p. 56), and the corresponding relationship between the general and the specific, are at the heart of scholarship in the humanities and social sciences (Allport, 1962; Baker & Welter, 2018; Chomsky & Schützenberger, 1963; Dilthey, 1991; Mills, 1959; Thorngate, 1976; Weber, 1978; Weick, 1979). There are longstanding tensions between “nomothetic” generalization across contexts and “idiographic” emphases of contextual and historical specificity, even though the author of these labels, Wilhelm Windelwand, highlighted in 1894 that “both forms of knowledge are equally justifiable” (Windelwand, 1980, p. 180).

Mainstream MOS has traditionally prioritized nomothetic generalization. Blair and Hunt (1986, p. 155) suggest that MOS researchers seeking “context-free . . . general truths” have more prestige because their “research is viewed as more consistent with fundamental values in science.” Corley and Gioia (2011, p. 20) state, “good theory emphasizes generalities.” Indeed, the editors of mainstream MOS journals frequently complain that submissions from Southern contexts place too much emphasis on context and often fail to explicate the general, theoretical argument. In his advice to “non-US authors,” George (2012, p. 1023) notes: “Though there could be prescriptive value in understanding how [for example] organizational identity as a construct operates

in Brazil, this value does not automatically translate to a framing that is meaningful to *AMJ*’s global readership because the underlying theory and hypotheses are the same as they have been in research in other settings; only the context has changed” (see also Crane, Henriques, Husted, & Matten, 2016).

On the other hand, there is a growing chorus in mainstream journals that context has been insufficiently considered in MOS. Johns (2006, p. 389) bemoans that contextual “influence is often unrecognized or underappreciated,” though he identifies significant progress in this regard ten years later (Johns, 2017). Such progress is also noted in Baker and Welter’s (2018) interdisciplinary overview of the role of context in entrepreneurship research. But they point to an important difference between attending to context to clarify “the functional relationship between variables” (Baker & Welter, 2018, p. 362) in order to enhance theoretical validity, as is emphasized by Johns (2006), and a more foundational approach to theorizing context, its meaning for actors, and its socially constructed nature:

It is one thing to contextualize our theories by adding this or that control variable, or adding even rich descriptions of research sites. It is quite another to begin to develop theory about contextual elements previously largely taken for granted and to develop theory about them . . . that is: to theorize contexts . . . to discover new insights that are based not just on filling random oversights and gaps in prior work, but also on addressing patterns and voices that have been systematically downplayed. (Baker & Welter, 2018, p. 369)

Such theorizing of context should address researchers’ tendency to “still assume that entrepreneurship [or by extension, organizing effort] is the same all over the world, regardless of cultural, institutional, social and spatial contexts” (Baker & Welter, 2018, p. 380). At the same time, it must avoid the other extreme, “in which consideration of the massively complex multidimensionality of context and resulting proliferation of unique standpoints renders

each individual opaque and ultimately unintelligible to every other (Scharfstein, 1989)” (Baker & Welter, 2018, p. 364). They suggest a pragmatic approach to finding a middle way between “the Scylla of contextual relativism and the Charybdis of ‘extreme sameness and objectivity’” (Dilley, 1999, p. 9). Building on Locke and Golden-Biddle (1997) and Alvesson and Sandberg (2011), they recommend “contextualizing as a means of ‘problematizing’ existing work: any delineation of contexts functions as a set of heuristics for decentering taken for granted facts and assumptions and most particularly for challenging specific forms of intellectual complacency” (Baker & Welter, 2018, p. 398).

It may be tempting to interpret this as another invitation to bring different contexts, perhaps even exotic contexts, into mainstream theorizing. But the call to “decenter” assumptions has a deeper and broader resonance. It suggests a humbler, more context-sensitive posture for all scholars working anywhere, in any context. That is, we need to complement increasing and more sophisticated attention to the context of our research subjects with similar attention to our own context, as researchers, recognizing that we are shaped by our contexts and also continuously construct and enact our contexts (much like our research subjects: Garud, Gehman, & Giuliani, 2014; Tsoukas, 2017). That is, as researchers “we ‘do contexts’” (Baker & Welter, 2018, p. 388) and must continuously reflect on and account for this. Of course, this is not a novel suggestion, given the extensive literature on reflexivity (Alvesson, Hardy, & Harley, 2008; Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Yet the opportunity remains to carefully consider why and how problematizing our contextual assumptions may apply to and help in addressing the tension between the Northern mainstream and the Southern critique in MOS, and how we might go about this.

To do so, it helps to consider more explicitly the role of our assumptions in the theorizing process. Cornelissen and Durand (2014, pp. 999, 1013) consider “the thinking processes

associated with theoretical contribution” and argue that in such processes, “incipient empirical observations . . . triggered the analogical transfer of assumptions, concepts, and explanatory principles from other literatures and fields that, in essence, formed a basis or stepping stone to flesh out a new theory.” In this analysis, the primary source of the assumptions and concepts that provide the raw resources for novel theoretical connections is “other literatures.” That is, a vital aspect of a researcher’s context is her or his theoretical training and points of departure (Baker & Welter, 2018; Cornelissen & Durand, 2014, p. 1000; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). However, a researcher’s entire life-world (Sandberg & Dall’Alba, 2009; Schuetz & Luckmann, 1973) provides her or him with the symbols, analogies, concepts, and counterfactuals that may provide resources in the theorizing process. Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p. 173) note, “The disposition to perceive the world and its surprises—including the very reflection on one’s positions in this world—is predicated on the researcher’s biography as well as on an affinity and familiarity with broader theoretical fields,” and this biography is perforce interwoven with the historical, social, political, and ecological aspects of her or his context.

We offer an amusing example of how personal life-worlds shape assumptions and analogies that influence theorizing. A prominent and much-respected American academic gave a seminar at the University of Cape Town. One of his points was that culture plays a much smaller role than sometimes assumed in shaping entrepreneurship around the world. To illustrate relevant cultural commonalities, he described his experiences at a recent Thanksgiving Dinner at his home, only to be told some while later that seminar participants had no idea what he was talking about because we have no such thing as a Thanksgiving Dinner in South Africa.

The opportunity is thus to consider how researchers’ context—encompassing their theoretical resources *and* their contextualized life-worlds—shape not just the theories they help develop, but also the way they consider context

in this theorizing process. We argue that the North–South tension in organizational scholarship is underpinned by systematic patterns in how context is approached in theorizing, cognitively and normatively. The Northern mainstream exhibits a tendency to systematically undervalue and underappreciate Southern contexts, while the Southern critique risks overemphasizing and valorizing these contexts. These tendencies contradict each other, but they both essentialize context. Both tend to subvert context to a higher-order, instrumental objective: for the Northern mainstream, it is to make ostensibly universal, global knowledge claims; and for the Southern reaction, it is to emphasize difference and structural disadvantage. We map these systematic biases in the Northern mainstream and the Southern critique in turn.

Northern Mainstream Biases: Erasing and Imposing

We have already expressed our unease with the phrase “institutional voids,” highlighted as a condition in Southern contexts by gatekeepers in the Northern mainstream. The phrase reflects what we call an erasing bias, that is, a tendency for scholars in the Northern mainstream to emphasize absences in Southern contexts relative to theoretical and personal assumptions and concepts originating in and premised upon Northern contexts. As noted by the originators of the term, institutional voids refer to the “absence in emerging markets of things we take for granted in our backyard in Boston” (Khanna & Palepu, 2010, p. xi). In a compelling critique, Bothello and colleagues (2019, p. 2) describe how “the burgeoning literature on institutional voids is driven by rote application of the concept by researchers who are too often separated from the contexts about which they theorize,” resulting “intentionally or not, into a pejorative and counterproductive portrayal of non-Western economies as institutionally inferior.”

The development and increasingly indiscriminate use of the concept has relied on analogical reasoning (Cornelissen & Durand, 2014), which highlighted what is not present

relative to the expected existence of formal institutions established by a Westphalian state, or more accurately the ideal of a Westphalian state, which is capable of establishing and enforcing commonly binding rules (Börzel & Risse, 2010). When organization scholars in the Northern mainstream started exploring management and organization in Southern contexts, they emphasized the absence of this baseline expectation. The notion of “institutional voids” highlights this absence and thus erases any consideration of what other institutions may, in fact, be present. This has some semblance to early European explorers describing the discovered lands as “*tabula rasa*” (Singh, 2003) when they encountered indigenous people, who they considered negligible and even exterminable.

To be clear, we are not accusing the authors who originated or have used the phrase “institutional voids” of intentional colonial nastiness. Indeed, some of us have used the term ourselves to analyze corruption (Luiz & Stewart, 2014) or to point to the vulnerability of many entrepreneurs in Malawi and Zambia, for example, who “struggle to connect with formal institutions that may be necessary for scale in the marketplace” (Luiz, Kachika, & Kudzurunga, 2019). In other words, we see where the notion of “voids” is coming from. But we have become increasingly concerned with the epistemic erasure that the phrase implies and may perpetuate. Others who have also used the term have in effect undermined its premises: “Whereas many studies view institutional voids as ‘empty’ of specific institutions, our findings suggest that voids occur amidst institutional plurality and are the intermediate outcome of conflict and contradiction among local political, community, and religious spheres” (Mair, Martí, & Ventresca, 2012, p. 820).

This erasing bias that assumes a sort of emptiness becomes clearer and more pronounced when we consider other scholarship that takes a more contextually reflexive approach, that is, which does not take as point of departure for analogical reasoning assumptions or expectations from a Northern context, but rather focuses attention on the historical and political circumstances of the context under consideration. For

example, Mamdani (1996) describes in rich, historical detail the colonial practices of establishing puppet traditional authorities as a form of “decentralized despotism,” and how these institutions were perpetuated and re-invented in post-colonial times, creating almost impossible circumstances for the ideal of a Westphalian state to be manifested. In other words, far from being devoid of institutions, postcolonial African contexts have been characterized by an overwhelming institutional complexity. This is a complexity that MOS scholarship has only begun exploring, including for instance the important nascent work on traditional governance structures (such as chieftainships), communal orientation, and norms of collectivism (such as *Ubuntu*) that distinguish management and organizing in many African contexts (e.g., Amoako & Lyon, 2014; Khavul, Bruton, & Wood, 2009; Khayesi & George, 2011; Slade Shantz, Kistruck, & Zietsma, 2018; Zoogah, Peng, & Woldu, 2015). Against this backdrop, the notion of “institutional voids” has arguably been an obstacle, as scholars are in some ways compelled to use this accepted term even though they are in fact explicating a more important and interesting institutional complexity than merely the absence of institutions expected from a straightforward Northern perspective (Bothello et al., 2019; Kistruck, Webb, Sutter, & Bailey, 2015; Luiz & Stewart, 2014; Mair et al., 2012).

Additionally, the erasing bias has arguably contributed to organization scholars missing opportunities to reflect upon how institutional complexity in Southern contexts may be “harbingers of . . . history-in-the-making” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012, p. 121) also in Northern contexts. It has been largely left to political scientists to show how “limited statehood” is not only a condition in Southern contexts, but is also increasingly associated with Northern states’ difficulties in responding to complex problems such as migration, populism, and climate change in their jurisdictions, despite the ostensible absence of institutional voids (Börzel, Risse, & Draude, 2018). In other words, “the things we take for granted in our backyards in Boston” (Khanna

& Palepu, 2010, p. xi) probably should not be taken for granted that much.

While the erasing bias creates an artificial absence of phenomena because they do not conform to expectations from researchers’ home contexts and associated assumptions, the imposing bias uses home assumptions to falsely or superficially interpret local phenomena. They go hand in hand, as the erasing bias creates a kind of vacuum that must then be filled with the conceptual substance imposed from established theories and expectations of the Northern mainstream. In the case of institutional voids, for instance, the erasing bias creates the empty space that is then filled by imposing ontological assumptions of the primacy of the market and corresponding formal institutions that reduce transaction costs: “In setting the US as a baseline, scholars also tend to bias their analyses to favor Western market-enabling institutions,” thereby reducing “the range of legitimate institutional arrangements to a narrow subset of Western-style institutions in the liberal tradition” (Bothello et al., 2019, p. 7; see also Bruton et al., 2018).

We may further illustrate this with reference to scholarly work on corporate responsibility. Attention to this theme grew in the mainstream MOS literature with the prominent debate between arguments for and against managers’ responsibilities for social issues and corporate stakeholders (Carroll, 1999; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Freeman & Liedtka, 1991; Friedman, 1970; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). Given that this debate was raging primarily among management scholars situated in North America and the United Kingdom, that is, countries characterized by “Western-style institutions in the liberal tradition” (Bothello et al., 2019, p. 7), the baseline assumption underlying this debate was that governments had little role in shaping or even defining corporate responsibilities. This assumption was problematic even across Northern contexts, giving rise to the influential distinction between “explicit” and “implicit” corporate responsibility (Matten & Moon, 2008). It is more so in many Southern contexts, given that governments have sought

to grapple with colonial legacies and have thus tried, often unsuccessfully, to direct business practices in pursuit of postcolonial transformation objectives to address social inequalities, including for instance diverse indigenization policies in many African countries. In this context, analyzing corporate responsibility as purely a matter of managers' voluntary discretion misses the mark (Reddy & Hamann, 2018). The mainstream MOS literature has started only quite recently to give the role of governments in shaping corporate responsibility more systematic attention (Kourula, Moon, Salles-Djelic, & Wickert, 2019).¹

Relatedly, the defenders of the corporate responsibility notion in the Northern mainstream have largely assumed that managers enacting corporate responsibility policies and practices is generally a "good thing." They have thus overlooked the possibility that such managerial policies and practices may be blind to historical, social, and political contexts, with the result that they may have negative unintended consequences. Khan and colleagues (Khan & Lund-Thomsen, 2011; Khan, Munir, & Willmott, 2007) show how corporate managers imposed a global set of assumptions around corporate responsibility and human rights without consideration of local contexts in Pakistan. They also failed to consider their position of power in relating to these contexts, with problematic consequences even for the disadvantaged members of society they were trying to help. The implication is not just that managers enacted "CSR as imperialism" (Khan & Lund-Thomsen, 2011), but that much of the mainstream CSR scholarship has been complicit in such imperialism, too.

Southern Critique Biases: Scapegoating and Valorizing

We also identify systematic biases in the theorizing processes among those objecting to the colonial tendencies of the Northern mainstream. In reaction to the erasing and imposing biases of the Northern mainstream, Southern critics may too easily revert to the opposite, that is, to

relying disproportionately on colonial history to explain Southern phenomena and to valorizing historical or contemporary social aspects of their Southern contexts. While the Northern mainstream often neglects the depth and significance of colonial history and ongoing colonial power relations in shaping Southern contexts, scholars in these latter contexts may overemphasize such history and relations as an overbearing or even only factor in their explanations, and in so doing underexpose other dimensions. This is a tendency in some Southern nations' political discourses. For instance, Zimbabwe's former president, Robert Mugabe, routinely blamed the colonial history of Zimbabwe, as well as contemporary colonial or imperial strategies of Northern countries, to explain his country's misfortunes, to blatantly distract from the serious abuses by his government.

A similar risk, though less obvious and egregious, is possible in organizational scholarship and specifically in arguments about decolonizing MOS. For example, while we agree with parts of Darley and Luethge's (2019) and Pederzini and Barraza's (2019) critiques of global accreditations in Southern contexts, we worry that some of their arguments come close to scapegoating because they underexpose endogenous reasons for Southern business schools' challenges. They identify a number of "stumbling blocks" in Southern business schools, such as research and teaching quality, and they emphasize that such "stumbling blocks" are magnified in the African context due to the impact of colonialism both as it influenced education in the past and as it continues to have lasting implications today" (Darley & Luethge, 2019). We have no problem with this analysis, except that it should be complemented by a careful analysis of additional, endogenous reasons for such challenges in enhancing research and teaching quality. Pederzini and Barraza (2019, p. 13) argue furthermore that "the doxa of continuous improvement" is imposed by the Northern mainstream and is to blame for Southern business schools' challenges. We struggle to see how the notion of "continuous improvement" represents colonial oppression

and worry that such arguments may distract from the tangible measures Southern business schools can and should take to better serve their students and communities.

A second risk of systematic bias lies in Southern researchers reacting to Northern scholars' dismissal of Southern contexts by valorizing such contexts. This risk was already mentioned above in connection with postcolonial theorists' warning about the dangers of romanticizing and essentializing indigenous culture and knowledge (Alcadipani et al., 2012), and the practical manifestation of this danger in South Africa's HIV/AIDS policies (Connell, 2014; Green, 2012). This risk may be seen manifest in organization theory when, for example, African leadership structures or styles are valorized uncritically. For example, Mangaliso (2011, p. 24) bemoans the Northern mainstream's assumption "that self-interest is the ultimate determinant of behavior" and offers the (South) African philosophy of *Ubuntu*—"a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness"—as an antidote not only on normative grounds, but also as a means to enhance competitive advantage.

Setting aside for a moment the tension between *Ubuntu* and competitiveness, we are concerned about some of the assumptions involved in arguing the benefits of *Ubuntu*. For instance, Mangaliso (2011, p. 25) argues as follows with regard to *Ubuntu*'s link to kinship relations:

Kinship ties also play an important part in hiring. Modern organizations usually frown on the hiring of relatives because of the negative stereotypes associated with nepotism. However, the opposite is true under *ubuntu*, which considers kinship ties within the organization to be a plus. After all, who can be trusted more than one's own relatives? Kinship is also formed with people who graduated from the same school, and with people whose origins can be traced to the same home town or village, commonly known as the "homeys." The presence of these kinship ties in the workplace provides a layer of emotional and psychological support to workers.

This is clearly a profound challenge to received wisdom and normative assumptions in the Northern mainstream. What makes it problematic, however, is that no empirical analysis is offered to support this view, relying instead on an assumed inherent value of a "philosophy of traditional cultures" (Lutz, 2009, p. 313). The risks posed to entrepreneurial and organizational effectiveness by constraining social relations (Kiggundu, 2002), by communal orientation (Khayesi & George, 2011), and by tribalism and nepotism (Zoogah et al., 2015) are thus left underexposed. More broadly, instead of contributing to South Africa having "turned the corner" (Mangaliso, 2011, p. 24), the explicit references to traditional belief systems by former President Jacob Zuma and others belie how such notions have been misapplied in the egregious structures of nepotism and corruption that have worsened South Africa's political and economic fortunes in the last decade (Chipkin et al., 2018; Meyer & Luiz, 2018). Similar trends have been analyzed by economists in other "transition" countries (Hellman, Jones, & Kaufmann, 2003).

Dialogical Contextualism

The above sections have suggested that scholars in both the Northern mainstream and the Southern critique are prone to systematic biases based on the assumptions they bring to their theorizing, and these assumptions come from both their theoretical points of departure and their personal life-worlds. The systematic biases have opposite forms, with the Northern mainstream erasing the significance of Southern contexts and instead imposing assumptions and concepts from its own context, and the Southern response reacting by devaluing ostensibly colonial notions such as "continuous improvement" and instead valorizing uncritically their own, such as *Ubuntu*. Despite these contradictory characteristics, these systematic biases have in common that they essentialize context—it is either disregarded or overbearing, and in both instances uncritically. The problem is thus not only that particular phenomena are essentialized because contexts are underappreciated, such as

women in leadership (Jackson, Helfen, Kaplan, Kirsch, & Lohmeyer, 2019), but contexts themselves are essentialized in binary terms as either Northern ideal vs. Southern inferior, or Northern colonial vs. Southern valor.

We agree with Baker's and Welter's (2018, p. 398) recommendation that the "ontological assumptions" (Bothello et al., 2019) linked to essentialized context offer opportunities for "challenging specific forms of intellectual complacency." Indeed, "the sort of problematizing that contextualizing processes can achieve is an important part of what . . . scholars do every day when they convince reviewers and editors that their research makes an interesting contribution" (Baker & Welter, 2018, p. 399). In other words, the dialectical process of identifying context-based assumptions and then systematically offering a critique (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011) is a vital part of "scientific progress" (Baker & Welter, 2018, p. 398). The articles we have mentioned above that have offered important, contextually reflexive counterpoints to essentialist approaches to context (e.g., Green, 2012; Khan et al., 2007; Khan & Lund-Thomsen, 2011; Matten & Moon, 2008) have all emerged as antithetical responses to such essentialist theses. This dialectic will continue to be vital in the theorizing process (Cornelissen & Durand, 2014) and in "systematically questioning our deeply embedded assumptions and seeking to break free of these entrenched bonds"—especially for "the Western scholar . . . studying other parts of the world" (Bothello et al., 2019, p. 10), but also for Southern scholars seeking to avoid scapegoating or valorizing biases.

However, we also point to some of the important constraints or downsides of this dialectic mode of scholarly engagement in challenging each other's "embedded assumptions." For a start, the dialectic approach contributes to the formation and concentration of group identities associated with the Northern mainstream and the Southern critique, at the risk of these conversations becoming totem poles with little fruitful interaction, "sequestering themselves into closed loops of scholarship and dismissing the work of outsiders" (Gulati, 2007, p. 775).

As we have outlined above, some of the systematic biases especially in the Southern critique at least in part emanate because of an aggrieved reaction to erasing and imposing biases in the Northern mainstream. Second, the dialectic scholarly process and the opportunities or constraints it creates are shaped by important gatekeepers, especially the reviewers and editors of mainstream journals, who are of course also embedded in their situational contexts and scholarly group identities. There is hence a particular need and challenge for these key actors to avoid contextualized assumptions and complacency (Bruton et al., 2018). This is also because Southern scholars often argue that their perspectives are diluted or contorted in the process of dialectically defending their arrival "on the shores of Global North journals . . . suffering severe deficiency, which reinforces perversely the Global North prejudices that the Global South is quite thin and shallow, lacking rigor and depth" (Khan & Naguib, 2019, p. 91).

We thus suggest that dialectic scholarly engagement may benefit from being complemented by dialogic engagement, which we propose in contradistinction to the predominant dialectic mode. The epistemic orientation in dialectic engagement is categorical. That is, actors engaging dialectically understand and pursue their interests by defining and controlling categorical boundaries (Nilsson, 2015), using "binary cultural codes" (Weber, Heinze, & Desoucey, 2008, p. 538) to create sharp distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate patterns of who gets to do what where (Lawrence, 1999), and what knowledge is valid and scientific, or not (Gieryn, 1983). In dialectic contests, scholars engage in advocacy much like incumbents and challengers in social conflicts, in which actors "articulate, sponsor, and defend" practices and knowledge claims that serve their institutional positions (Lawrence, 1999, p. 163) using social, political, and cultural skill (Fligstein, 2001) to frame issues and mobilize resources accordingly (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006; Nilsson, 2015; Seo & Creed, 2002).

In contrast, dialogical engagement is focused not primarily in advancing a particular position,

but on the intersubjective relationship (Buber, 1958): how can we meet as person to person, subject to subject, rather than as subject to object? To better understand dialogue in practice, we draw on Freire's (2005) notion of praxis—the participatory, dialogic interplay of action and reflection in the pursuit of social transformation. Dialogic agency in this tradition is not enacted through interest- or knowledge-based contests. In fact, it problematizes the notion of sectarian interests and superior knowledge by not taking the seemingly clear delineation between self and other for granted (see also Khan & Naguib, 2019). Rather than championing specific theories or beliefs, participants in dialogue work to reflect upon and suspend their own assumptions in order to co-create new ways of seeing and new expressions of meaning (Bohm, 1996; Buber, 1958).

Part of dialogue's generative power for our purposes is thus its ability to disturb taken-for-granted categories and to suggest new combinations (Isaacs, 1999). Dialogue disrupts the categories by revealing that social experience is both infinitely variegated (thus resistant to categorical reduction) and also unitary in that foundational interests related to human dignity and freedom are presumed to be universal goods, applicable to everyone (Freire, 2005). In other words, a dialogical approach to contextual reflexivity may allow for a constructive scholarly conversation about different contexts and our associated "embedded assumptions" because such differences are placed within an overarching and inclusive whole. It would also allow especially the custodians of the Northern mainstream to create greater openings for "epistemic rupture (Bachelard, 1938) to explicitly and fundamentally rethink the position of the Western scholar when studying other parts of the world" (Bothello et al., 2019, p. 10), as well as "epistemic healing," which "starts with identifying and calling back into the knowledge spaces of the Global North those diverse knowledge traditions and resources of the other from the Global South that have been cast aside and ignored" (Khan & Naguib, 2019, p. 92). Consequently, the capacity to deconstruct and then recombine elements of knowledge

across diverse contexts is strengthened in a bricolage process: "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 2005, p. 72).

Such dialogical interaction between scholars from different contexts can provide alternative spaces for collaborative questioning of contextual assumptions, bringing to the surface not only their cognitive dimensions but also their sometimes painful, personal, and experiential aspects associated with legacies of colonialism and exclusion. This philosophical re-orientation has practical implications and manifestations. We suspect that most opportunities for scholars to interact dialogically to question each other's contextual assumptions occur in informal conversations or in seminars facilitated in a conducive manner. There is much to be said, therefore, for face-to-face interaction between scholars from across Northern and Southern contexts, in circumstances that reflect the complementary benefits of dialogical engagement over and above dialectic interaction. Some such spaces for interaction are increasingly provided, for instance, in the main conferences in our field. For example, the AOM Organization and Management Theory division has begun hosting a regular Professional Development Workshop as part of the AOM Annual Meeting focused on bringing together scholars from different contexts.

However, the kind of dialogue we have in mind cannot blossom in a morning-long session, however well facilitated it might be. We are calling here for longer-term, more intensive interactions, such as those that are possible in co-authorship teams (such as this one) or in joint PhD programs that combine faculty and students from Northern and Southern contexts. It is the kind of intensive discussion involved in co-authorship that can bring contextualized assumptions to the fore in generative ways. For instance, one of us was writing on the egregious, institutionalized systems of exploitation in the South African mining industry and struggled to recognize their broader, transferable

implications. It required repeated prodding and coaxing by his Canadian co-author, as well as her knowledge of different contexts, to explicate them (Hamann & Bertels, 2018). Thankfully such collaboration across continents is becoming easier with videoconferencing and other communication technologies.

Yet these relational opportunities for direct dialogue are not the only manifestations of dialogical contextualism. Dialogue across contexts can also be supported in the more formal aspects of scholarship, including the journal review process, as long as reviewers and editors remain alert to the importance of context and the need for epistemic rupture and healing, as well as the possibility of dialogically engaging toward this collective transformation ambition (Freire, 2005).

Conclusion

We commenced this article by expressing our unease with what we described as one-sided invitations into the Northern mainstream, as well as Southern critics' invitation into indigenous enclaves. We used this dichotomy to theorize the role of context in theorizing, by linking conversations on theorizing context (Baker & Welter, 2018), analogical reasoning (Cornelissen & Durand, 2014), and problematizing assumptions (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2011). This recognizes the opportunity to more carefully consider how researchers' theoretical backgrounds, as well as their personal life-worlds, provide the assumptions and analogies they bring into their theorizing. We used this platform to consider in more detail systematic biases in both the Northern mainstream (erasing and imposing biases) and the Southern critique (scapegoating and valorizing biases). These biases originate in opposing approaches to context, but their commonality is that they essentialize context. To address this and to facilitate contextual reflexivity for scholars across Northern and Southern contexts, we built on Freire (2005) to propose dialogical scholarly engagement to generate complementary, alternative spaces to collaboratively question our contextual assumptions,

bringing to the surface their cognitive and emotional dimensions. We called this posture *dialogical contextualism*.

The relevance of this goes beyond scholars in Southern contexts or the editors, reviewers, and accreditors in the Northern mainstream. We are all implicated, in some way, in historical and ongoing processes of colonization (Nkomo, 2015), with implications for our individual and group identities, the organizations we study, and the broader "world-historical processes" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012, p. 121) of which they are part. We have argued that this colonial implication is a vital aspect of the relationship between theory and context, so the imbrication of colonialism and context is central to our scholarly mission.

On this broader canvass, we built upon contributions on the role of context in organizational scholarship that not only seek enhanced theoretical validity (Johns, 2006; Rousseau & Fried, 2001) but also navigate between the extremes of contextual relativism and decontextualized universalism (Baker & Welter, 2018). And while we sympathize with calls for more plurality and emic perspectives in "indigenous theories" (Bruton et al., 2018; Nkomo, 2011), our ambition was a bit broader than that. We sought to foreground the role of our contextual life-worlds in our scholarly reflexivity (Alvesson et al., 2008), and so to highlight the risks of essentializing not only our phenomena but our own contexts, as well. Our recommendation is thus to attend more carefully to how our theoretical and life-world contexts shape the assumptions and analogies we bring to the theorizing process, and to do so in transformative dialogue with others from different contexts.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful for thoughtful provocations on these topics from students in the PhD program at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business, including in particular Cynthia Rayner, and comments on previous drafts by Judith Walls and three anonymous reviewers for the Academy of Management 2019 Annual Meeting. We also very much appreciate constructive comments by the journal editors, Joel Gehman and Joep Cornelissen.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note

1. A similar argument about mainstream MOS' failure to sufficiently consider the role of governments in non-US contexts has been made with regard to entrepreneurship (Bruton et al., 2018).

References

- Abrahamsen, R. (2017). Africa and international relations: Assembling Africa, studying the world. *African Affairs*, 116(462), 125–139.
- Alcadipani, R., Khan, F. R., Gantman, E., & Nkomo, S. (2012). Southern voices in management and organization knowledge. *Organization*, 19, 131–143.
- Alcadipani, R., & Rosa, A. R. (2011). From global management to glocal management: Latin American perspectives as a counter-dominant management epistemology. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 28, 453–466.
- Allport, G. W. (1962). The general and the unique in psychological science. *Journal of Personality*, 30, 405–423.
- Alvesson, M., Hardy, C., & Harley, B. (2008). Reflecting on reflexivity: Reflexive textual practices in organization and management theory. *Journal of Management Studies*, 45, 480–501.
- Alvesson, M., & Sandberg, J. (2011). Generating research questions through problematization. *Academy of Management Review*, 36, 247–271.
- Amoako, I. O., & Lyon, F. (2014). “We don’t deal with courts”: Cooperation and alternative institutions shaping exporting relationships of small and medium-sized enterprises in Ghana. *International Small Business Journal*, 32, 117–139.
- Bachelard, G. (1938). *The formation of the scientific mind*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Baker, T., & Welter, F. (2018). Contextual entrepreneurship: An interdisciplinary perspective. *Foundations and Trends® in Entrepreneurship*, 14, 357–426.
- Barley, S., Bechky, B., & Milliken, F. (2017). The changing nature of work: Careers, identities, and work lives in the 21st century. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 3, 111–115.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Blair, J. D., & Hunt, J. G. (1986). Getting inside the head of the management researcher one more time: Context-free and context-specific orientations in research. *Journal of Management*, 12, 147–166.
- Bohm, D. (1996). *On dialogue*. London: Routledge.
- Börzel, T. A., & Risse, T. (2010). Governance without a state: Can it work? *Regulation & Governance*, 4, 113–134.
- Börzel, T. A., Risse, T., & Draude, A. (Eds.) (2018). *The Oxford handbook of governance and limited statehood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bothello, J., Nason, R. S., & Schnyder, G. (2019). Institutional voids and organization studies: Towards an epistemological rupture. *Organization Studies*, 40, 1499–1512.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *In other words: Essays towards a reflexive sociology*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bruton, G. D., Ireland, D., & Ketchen, D. (2012). Toward a research agenda on the informal economy. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 26, 1–11.
- Bruton, G. D., Zahra, S. A., & Cai, L. (2018). Examining entrepreneurship through indigenous lenses. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, 42, 351–361.
- Buber, M. (1958). *I and thou* (2nd edition). New York: Scribner’s.
- Caldas, M. P., & Wood, T. (1997). “For the English to see”: The importation of managerial technology in late 20th-century Brazil. *Organization*, 4, 517–534.
- Cappelli, P., & Sherer, P. D. (1991). The missing role of context in OB: The need for a meso-level approach. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 13, 55–110.
- Carroll, A. B. (1999). Corporate social responsibility: Evolution of a definitional construct. *Business & Society*, 38, 268–295.
- Chakrabarty, D. (2000). *Provincializing Europe*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chipkin, I., Swilling, M., Bhorat, H., Qobo, M., Duma, S., & Mondli, L. (2018). *Shadow state:*

- The politics of state capture*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Chomsky, N., & Schützenberger, M. P. (1963). The algebraic theory of context-free languages. *Studies in Logic and the Foundations of Mathematics*, 35, 118–161.
- Comaroff, J., & Comaroff, J. L. (2012). Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is evolving toward Africa. *Anthropological Forum*, 22, 113–131.
- Connell, R. (2007). *Southern theory: The global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Connell, R. (2014). Using southern theory: Decolonizing social thought in theory, research and application. *Planning Theory*, 13, 210–223.
- Connell, R., Maia, J., & Morrell, R. (2017). Toward a global sociology of knowledge: Post-colonial realities and intellectual practices. *International Sociology*, 32, 21–37.
- Corley, K. G., & Gioia, D. A. (2011). Building theory about theory building: What constitutes a theoretical contribution? *Academy of Management Review*, 36, 12–32.
- Cornelissen, J. P., & Durand, R. (2014). Moving forward: Developing theoretical contributions in management studies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51, 995–1022.
- Crane, A., Henriques, I., Husted, B. W., & Matten, D. (2016). Publishing country studies in Business & Society: Or, do we care about CSR in Mongolia? *Business & Society*, 55, 3–10.
- Darley, W. K., & Luethge, D. J. (2019). Management and business education in Africa: A post-colonial perspective of international accreditation. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 18, 99–111.
- Dilley, R. (1999). Introduction: The problem of context. In R. Dilley (Ed.), *The problem of context* (pp. 1–46). Oxford: Berghahn.
- Dilthey, W. (1991). *Introduction to the human sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Donaldson, T., & Preston, L. E. (1995). The stakeholder theory of the corporation. *Academy of Management Review*, 20, 65–91.
- EFMD. (2018). EQUIS–EFMD Quality Improvement System.
- Fanon, F. (2008). *Black skin, white masks*. New York: Grove Press.
- Fligstein, N. (2001). Social skill and the theory of fields. *Sociological Theory*, 19, 105–125.
- Freeman, R. E., & Liedtka, J. (1991). Corporate social responsibility: A critical approach. *Business Horizons*, 34(4), 92–99.
- Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th edition). London: Continuum.
- Frenkel, M., & Shenhav, Y. (2006). From binarism back to hybridity: A postcolonial reading of management and organization studies. *Organization Studies*, 27, 855–876.
- Friedman, M. (1970). The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits. *New York Times Magazine*.
- Garud, R., Gehman, J., & Giuliani, A. P. (2014). Contextualizing entrepreneurial innovation: A narrative perspective. *Research Policy*, 43, 1177–1188.
- George, G. (2012). From the editors. Publishing in AMJ for non-U.S. authors. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55, 1023–1026.
- George, G., Corbishley, C., Khayesi, J. N. O., Haas, M. R., & Tihanyi, L. (2016). From the Editors: Bringing Africa in: Promising directions for management research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 59, 377–393.
- Gevisser, M. (2007). *Thabo Mbeki: The dream deferred*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.
- Gieryn, T. F. (1983). Boundary-work and the demarcation of science from non-science: Strains and interests in professional ideologies of scientists. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 781–795.
- Green, L. J. F. (2012). Beyond South Africa's "indigenous knowledge–science" wars. *South African Journal of Science*, 108(7–8), 1–10.
- Gulati, R. (2007). Tent poles, tribalism, and boundary spanning: The rigor–relevance debate in management research. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50, 775–782.
- Hamann, R., & Bertels, S. (2018). The institutional work of exploitation: Employers' work to create and perpetuate inequality. *Journal of Management Studies*, 55, 394–423.
- Hargrave, T. J., & van de Ven, A. H. (2006). A collective action model of institutional innovation. *Academy of Management Review*, 31, 864–888.
- Hellman, J. S., Jones, G., & Kaufmann, D. (2003). Seize the state, seize the day: State capture and influence in transition economies. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 31, 751–773.
- Hountondji, P. J. (Ed.) (1997). *Endogenous knowledge: Research trails*. African Books Collective.

- Ibarra-Colado, E. (2006). Organization studies and epistemic coloniality in Latin America: Thinking otherness from the margins. *Organization*, 13, 463–488.
- Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue: The art of thinking together*. New York: Doubleday.
- Islam, G. (2012). Can the subaltern eat? Anthropophagic culture as a Brazilian lens on post-colonial theory. *Organization*, 19, 159–180.
- Jack, G., Westwood, R., Srinivas, N., & Sardar, Z. (2011). Deepening, broadening and re-asserting a postcolonial interrogative space in organization studies. *Organization*, 18, 275–302.
- Jackson, G., Helfen, M., Kaplan, R., Kirsch, A., & Lohmeyer, N. (2019). The problem of de-contextualization in organization and management research. In T. B. Zilber, J. M. Amis, & J. Mair (Eds.), *The production of managerial knowledge and organizational theory : New approaches to writing, producing and consuming theory* (Vol. 59, pp. 21–42). Bingley, UK: Emerald.
- Johns, G. (2006). The essential impact of context on organizational behavior. *Academy of Management Review*, 31, 386–408.
- Johns, G. (2017). Reflections on the 2016 Decade Award: Incorporating context in organizational research. *Academy of Management Review*, 42, 577–595.
- Khan, F. R., & Lund-Thomsen, P. (2011). CSR as imperialism: Towards a phenomenological approach to CSR in the developing world. *Journal of Change Management*, 11, 73–90.
- Khan, F. R., Munir, K. A., & Willmott, H. (2007). A dark side of institutional entrepreneurship: Soccer balls, child labour and postcolonial impoverishment. *Organization Studies*, 28, 1055–1077.
- Khan, F. R., & Naguib, R. (2019). Epistemic healing: A critical ethical response to epistemic violence in business ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 156, 89–104.
- Khanna, T., & Palepu, K. G. (2010). *Winning in emerging markets: A road map for strategy and execution*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Khavul, S., Bruton, G. D., & Wood, E. (2009). Informal family business in Africa. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice*, 33, 1219–1238.
- Khayesi, J. N. O., & George, G. (2011). When does the socio-cultural context matter? Communal orientation and entrepreneurs' resource accumulation efforts in Africa. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 84, 471–492.
- Kiggundu, M. N. (2002). Entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship in Africa: What is known and what needs to be done. *Journal of Developmental Entrepreneurship*, 7(3), 171.
- Kiggundu, M., & Lamont, B. (2015). Introduction to the *Africa Journal of Management*: The journey begins. *Africa Journal of Management*, 1(1), 1–3.
- Kistruck, G. M., Webb, J. W., Sutter, C. J., & Bailey, A. V. G. (2015). The double-edged sword of legitimacy in base-of-the-pyramid markets. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 30, 436–451.
- Kothiyal, N., Bell, E., & Clarke, C. (2018). Moving beyond mimicry: Developing hybrid spaces in Indian business schools. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 17, 137–154.
- Kourula, A., Moon, J., Salles-Djelic, M. L., & Wickert, C. (2019). New roles of government in the governance of business conduct: Implications for management and organizational research. *Organization Studies*, 40, 1101–1123.
- Lawrence, T. B. (1999). Institutional strategy. *Journal of Management*, 25, 161–187.
- Locke, K., & Golden-Biddle, K. (1997). Constructing opportunities for contribution: Structuring intertextual coherence and “problematizing” in organizational studies. *Academy of Management Journal*, 40, 1023–1062.
- Luiz, J. M., Kachika, K., & Kudzurunga, T. (2019). Negotiating new institutional logics: Market access amongst smallholder farmers in Zambia and Malawi. *Society and Business Review*, forthcoming.
- Luiz, J. M., & Stewart, C. (2014). Corruption, South African multinational enterprises and institutions in Africa. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 124, 383–398.
- Lutz, D. W. (2009). African ubuntu philosophy and global management. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 84(3 suppl.), 313–328.
- Mair, J., Martí, I., & Ventresca, M. J. (2012). Building inclusive markets in rural Bangladesh: How intermediaries work institutional voids. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55, 819–850.
- Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Mangaliso, M. P. (2011). Building competitive advantage from ubuntu: Management lessons from South Africa. *Academy of Management Executive*, 15(3), 23–33.
- Matten, D., & Moon, J. (2008). “Implicit” and “explicit” CSR: A conceptual framework for a comparative understanding of corporate social responsibility. *Academy of Management Review*, 33, 404–424.
- McWilliams, A., & Siegel, D. (2001). Corporate social responsibility: A theory of the firm perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 26, 117–127.
- Meyer, K. Z., & Luiz, J. M. (2018). Corruption and state capture in South Africa: Will the institutions hold? In B. Warf (Ed.), *Handbook on the geographies of corruption*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Mills, C. W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mufti, A. (2005). Global comparativism. *Critical Inquiry*, 31(2), 472–489.
- Murphy, J., & Zhu, J. (2012). Neo-colonialism in the academy? Anglo-American domination in management journals. *Organization*, 19, 915–927.
- Nilsson, W. (2015). Positive institutional work: Exploring institutional work through the lens of positive organizational scholarship. *Academy of Management Review*, 40, 370–398.
- Nkomo, S. M. (1992). The emperor has no clothes: Rewriting “race in organizations.” *Academy of Management Review*, 17, 487–513.
- Nkomo, S. M. (2011). A postcolonial and anti-colonial reading of “African” leadership and management in organization studies: Tensions, contradictions and possibilities. *Organization*, 18, 365–386.
- Nkomo, S. M. (2015). Challenges for management and business education in a “Developmental” State: The case of South Africa. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 14, 242–258.
- Pederzini, G. D. A., & Barraza, M. F. S. (2019). Just let us be: Domination, the postcolonial condition and the global field of business schools. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, in press.
- Reddy, C. D., & Hamann, R. (2018). Distance makes the (committed) heart grow colder: MNEs’ responses to the state logic in African variants of CSR. *Business and Society*, 57, 562–594.
- Rousseau, D. M., & Fried, Y. (2001). Editorial: Location, location, location: Contextualizing organizational research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 22, 1–13.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism: Western representations of the Orient*. London: Penguin.
- Sandberg, J., & Dall’Alba, G. (2009). Returning to practice anew: A life-world perspective. *Organization Studies*, 30, 1349–1368.
- Santos, B. de S. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. London: Routledge.
- Scharfstein, B. A. (1989). *The dilemma of context*. New York: NYU Press.
- Schuetz, A., & Luckmann, T. (1973). *The structures of the life-world (volume 1)*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Seo, M.-G., & Creed, W. E. D. (2002). Institutional contradictions, praxis, and institutional change: A dialectical perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 27, 222–247.
- Singh, J. (2003). *Colonial narratives/cultural dialogues: “Discoverie”, of India in the language of colonialism*. New York: Routledge.
- Slade Shantz, A., Kistruck, G., & Zietsma, C. (2018). The opportunity not taken: The occupational identity of entrepreneurs in contexts of poverty. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 33, 416–437.
- Spivak, G. C. (1998). *In other worlds: Essays in cultural politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Srinivas, N. (2013). Could a subaltern manage? Identity work and habitus in a colonial workplace. *Organization Studies*, 34, 1655–1674.
- Thorngate, W. (1976). “In general” vs. “it depends”: Some comments on the Gergen-Schlenker debate. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 2(4), 404–410.
- Timmermans, S., & Tavory, I. (2012). Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory*, 30, 167–186.
- Tsoukas, H. (2017). Don’t simplify, complexify: From disjunctive to conjunctive theorizing in organization and management studies. *Journal of Management Studies*, 54, 132–153.
- Ul-Haq, S., & Westwood, R. (2012). The politics of knowledge, epistemological occlusion and Islamic management and organization knowledge. *Organization*, 19, 229–257.
- Van de Ven, A. H., Meyer, A. D., & Jing, R. (2018). Opportunities and challenges of engaged indigenous scholarship – Addendum. *Management and Organization Review*, p.647.

- Webb, J. W., Tihanyi, L., Ireland, R. D., & Sirmon, D. G. (2009). You say illegal, I say legitimate: Entrepreneurship in the informal economy. *Academy of Management Review*, 34, 492–510.
- Weber, K., Heinze, K. L., & Desoucey, M. (2008). Forage for thought: Mobilizing codes in the movement for grass-fed meat and dairy. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 53, 529–567.
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing* (2nd edition). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Westwood, R., & Jack, G. (2008). The US commercial-military-political complex and the emergence of international business and management studies. *Critical Perspectives on International Business*, 4, 367–388.
- Westwood, R., Jack, G., Khan, F., & Frenkel, M. (Eds.) (2014). *Core-periphery relations and organization studies*. Springer.
- Windelwand, W. (1980). Rectorial address, Strasbourg, 1894. *History and Theory*, 19, 169–185.
- Wolpe, H. (1975). The theory of internal colonization: The South African case. *Collected Seminar Papers, Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, 18, 105–120.
- Yousfi, H. (2014). Rethinking hybridity in postcolonial contexts: What changes and what persists? The Tunisian case of Poulina's managers. *Organization Studies*, 35, 393–421.
- Zoogah, D. B., Peng, M. W., & Woldu, H. (2015). Institutions, resources, and organizational effectiveness in Africa. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 29, 7–31.

Author biographies

Ralph Hamann is professor and research director at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business.

John Luiz is a professor of international management at the University of Sussex Business School and at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business.

Kutlwano Ramaboa is a senior lecturer and international relations director at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business.

Xolisa Dhlamini is a lecturer and PhD student at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business.

Farzad Khan is an associate professor of management in the Prince Mohammad Bin Salman College of Business and Entrepreneurship (Saudi Arabia).

Warren Nilsson is an associate professor in social innovation at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business.